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ABSTRACT

This book draws on hundreds of letters by students, parents, and school officials to explore American Indian, specifically Ojibwa, perspectives of the boarding school experience in the period from 1900-1940. The three institutions studied are Haskell Institute (Kansas), Flandreau School (South Dakota), and Pipestone School (Minnesota). Chapter 1 gives a brief history of Indian boarding schools. Chapter 2 reviews how Indians were defrauded into poverty, leaving boarding schools the only option for Indian parents who wanted their children's basic needs met. Chapter 3 describes the most objectionable acculturation tactics, such as name changes, hair cuts, and uniforms, and the often poor conditions at the schools. In 1928, the Meriam Report confirmed parents' complaints, finding that the government boarding schools were inadequate and overcrowded; they needlessly separated families; and students were often malnourished, sick, insufficiently clothed, overworked, harshly punished, and poorly trained. Chapter 4 addresses the homesickness that resulted from the assimilationist policy of keeping students at school until their terms of study had expired. Chapter 5 describes how tuberculosis, trachoma, and other serious diseases flourished in the overcrowded schools, and were carried to the reservations by returning students. Chapter 6 relates how so-called vocational education was actually labor for the school and left little time for academic education. The "outing program," touted as vocational education, was a plan for hiring out boys for odd jobs and girls for domestic service. Reforms following the Meriam Report resulted in improved vocational training. Chapter 7 describes running away as a common reaction to school inadequacies, and the harsh measures schools used to combat it. The postgraduate lives of boarding school students are examined in the conclusion. Four appendices cover enrollment statistics (Red Lake students who attended nonreservation schools circa 1929; Flandreau enrollment figures, 1893-1939; Flandreau enrollment distributions by tribe and state, 1937-38; and Haskell Institute cemetery burials by tribal name on tombstone. Contains photographs, notes, a bibliography, and an index. (TD)